

The Great West Coast Maritime Strike

By SAM DARCY

NOTE: At this writing we are yet in midstream, so to speak, in the West Coast maritime strike. Our chief concern is to get to the other bank. This is therefore, not altogether a good moment in which to stop to write how far we have gotten. Subsequent developments may throw new light on what we think has already happened. This is especially so since the strike area extends for 1,900 miles and our information from the minor ports is not complete in all details. Writing these notes now, however, has its compensations: in the critical examination of the development of the strike, increasing discussion will help strengthen revolutionary activity amongst the workers in this strike as well as in other class battles.

IT IS commonly agreed on the West Coast that the present militant strike is the largest ever conducted in the maritime industry, and the best organized and disciplined up to this moment in any industry in the history of the West. There are, at this writing, about 35,000 workers involved. The main center, in the San Francisco Bay area, includes 14,000 workers.

Participating directly in the strike are all longshore and seamen crafts and scalers, and indirectly, it includes sympathetic action by teamsters, machinists, boiler-makers, ship-yard workers and other minor crafts.

In order more easily to study the development of this movement, we are dividing our subject into four main headings:

1. Problems in developing the movement for struggle.
2. Problems in the calling of the strike.
3. Problems in the conduct of the strike.
4. Perspectives for the outcome of the strike.

PROBLEMS IN DEVELOPING THE MOVEMENT FOR STRUGGLE

For about a decade, with but minor exceptions, San Francisco longshoremen have been operating under a "Blue Book Union". This is a company union operated by the shipowners which has all of the characteristic evils of every other company union in the

country. Yet it had been recognized by the Central Labor Council.

At the end of 1932, at the initiative of the militant elements on the waterfront, agitation for the organization of a real workers' union began. This agitation centered chiefly around the publication of a mimeographed bulletin called the *Waterfront Worker* which had an average paid circulation of about 1,000 to 1,500 copies. In the group which published the *Waterfront Worker*, were included a minority of Communists, and other militant elements. The guiding line for this group was above all to develop a militant group of workers united with the objective of breaking the Blue Book Union and to establish a real union. At times there was criticism that the *Waterfront Worker* did not take a clearly enough militant stand on this or that policy. When this criticism was justified, it could in every instance be traced to the desire of the Communist elements in the group not to sacrifice the unity of the militant elements for a clearer formulation in minor questions. In other words, the group felt it was more important to attain the larger objective of developing a united militant group (not limited to Communists alone) than to refuse to make a concession to this or that backward idea amongst the workers. Occasionally the Communist elements in the group made errors, in that they bent back too far. However, in the main, the *Waterfront Worker* is responsible for developing the spirit for organization and crystallizing the sentiment for the movement against the company union. During this time, the Marine Workers Union attempted, in various forms, to organize the men. These met with very small progress. The chief reasons were:

1. In the two or three years previous the Marine Workers Union had made some serious sectarian errors. These were utilized by the reactionary elements on the Waterfront to prevent any response from the men. This could have been easily broken down, if the Party and the Union had any of its members actually working on the docks. Unfortunately, however, our Marine Workers Union, although having as many as four and sometimes six full-time functionaries in San Francisco alone, had not a single worker on the docks. Because of this, we approached the entire situation from the outside, and were not able to break down the agitation against our union and against the Party on the Waterfront. The reactionary elements were led by some members of the old Red Book Union of 1919. This old union had a reputation, whether justified or not, for militant struggle. Under the activity of the company union, it had long since disappeared. However, some of the reactionaries who were formerly members of this old Red Book Union,

by use of militant phraseology, succeeded in turning the minds of the men away from a militant union.

About the middle of 1933, an initiative group was formed, which included all elements (also some militants from the *Waterfront Worker*), to establish a regular local of the I.L.A. The sentiment for the I.L.A. rapidly developed. Yet there was some tendency among the Communists at that time to organize competitive M.W.I.U. recruiting. The I.L.A. movement was so overwhelming among the men, however, that it would have been suicide to take the handful of militants away from the general stream of the movement. The Party, therefore, took a determined stand against it.

In some of the smaller ports, on the West Coast, especially in the Northwest, functioning locals of the I.L.A. already existed, and in the short space of about six weeks, the overwhelming majority of the longshoremen on the West Coast joined the I.L.A.

From the moment of organizing, a struggle began between the militant elements on the one hand, who wanted action—to: (1) Improve conditions; (2) Destroy the Blue Book; (3) Establish West Coast Unity of all longshoremen—and the reactionaries, on the other hand, who aimed to organize a typical A. F. of L. reactionary union. In the course of this fight between the reactionary and militant elements, the militant elements succeeded in putting through a proposal to call an early West Coast Rank-and-File Convention. The reactionaries resisted such a movement, but their own radical phraseology counted against them. The men were convinced of the necessity for a rank-and-file controlled convention, and even succeeded in putting through a motion that to the Rank-and-File Convention, paid officers of the union should not qualify as delegates. This convention met in February, 1934, and remained in session for about ten days. The convention was a continual battle between the militants and the reactionaries. The reactionaries concentrated everything on winning the organizational leadership of the union, and in this they succeeded. At various times in the course of the convention they “laid off” in their opposition to certain militant proposals for fear it would antagonize the men. They did succeed in winning organizational leadership of the union. They elected an Executive Board and other posts, composed, for all practical purposes, of reactionaries. However, in the course of the convention, a series of militant proposals were adopted. These included:

Struggle for improved conditions, including raises in wages from 85 cents to \$1.00 per hour, a thirty-hour week, hiring through I.L.A., and a united West Coast agreement with a uniform expiration date.

There were also a number of directly political achievements at the convention. These included: 1. The adoption of a resolution against the loading of ships flying the Nazi flag. 2. The adoption of a proposal for a waterfront federation which was a first step towards united action between longshoremen and other marine crafts, especially the seamen, and for gang committees, port conferences, etc. 3. Unemployment insurance. 4. Against arbitration.

When the convention adjourned, the reactionaries felt victorious because they had succeeded in gaining organizational control of the union. They even thought they had dealt a blow of another sort at the militants in the course of the convention. This happened in the following way:

The San Francisco local had sent a very militant delegation. This delegation was the backbone and leadership of the militant sentiment in the convention. In the course of the convention a delegation was elected to present the workers' demands to the shipowners. When these demands were presented, the shipowners answered that they could not deal with this convention because it was largely dominated by Communist elements, and they gave as evidence that the San Francisco delegation allegedly had 16 out of 20 members who were Communists. The reactionary elements were in glee at this answer of the shipowners. But when this reached the men, they were highly indignant. The general sentiment being expressed by one non-Communist speaker from the ranks in the convention, who declared:

"Do the shipowners think we are still in the Blue Book, that they are trying to dictate to us who our representatives should be?"

From this, it can be seen that although the rank-and-file convention ended organizationally successfully for the reactionaries, yet the whole movement crystallized and spread the militant sentiment of the men. But the convention did not end in complete organizational loss to the militants. In fact, as a result of the convention, a fairly strong permanent militant group was established in San Francisco with connection in all other ports of the West Coast.

Immediately after the convention the representatives of the I.L.A. entered into negotiations with the shipowners. These began on March 5, 1934, in a meeting with the Regional Board of the Federal Administration and the shipowners participating. The shipowners turned down the demands of the convention flatly. The negotiations dragged on until finally, about the middle of March, the men became somewhat fed up. Due both to the physically advantageous position of leadership which San Francisco holds on the West Coast, as well as the activities of the militants, action in

San Francisco became of decisive importance for the entire Coast. Therefore when negotiations were obviously futile, the San Francisco local pressed forward, and by popular vote, set a strike date for March 23. They also elected a strike committee of 25 in the leadership of which were the most militant elements of the union.

The fakers, knowing they could not hold the men, did not act to stop this movement until the afternoon of March 22, the day before the strike date, when as a result of what clearly was cooperation between George Creel, head of the Regional Labor Board, the shipowners, and William Lewis, who was elected president of the entire West Coast Union, a telegram was negotiated from President Roosevelt, personally appealing to the men not to strike until the Federal Government could take action. It was clear from subsequent actions that one of the prime objectives in postponing the struggle was to hold it until the college terms would end, so that a plentiful supply of student scabs might be obtained. Without consulting any official body, Lewis immediately announced that the strike was off, and even tried to cancel a meeting of the strike committee which was slated for the evening of March 22. Since the strike was called for the very next morning, there was practically no opportunity to counteract this treacherous action of Lewis.

Also, the militants on the Strike Committee made a mistake in not contacting other ports immediately after they were elected, and taking the leadership out of the hands of Lewis and the District Executive Board. This mistake came about in the following way:

March 23, the date of the strike, was on Friday. On the previous Monday of the same week, in the San Francisco local meeting, a motion was put through giving full power in the strike to the District Executive Board which, as we have already pointed out, was composed of reactionaries. This motion made of the strike committee a body without any real authority. The passing of this motion also clearly indicated that even the San Francisco longshoremen still had strong illusions concerning the District Executive Board. As a result of this motion, the militants in the strike committee refrained from communicating with other ports because they were afraid of being accused of exceeding their legal authority. By Thursday night, when Lewis, at the request of President Roosevelt, called off the strike, it was then too late to correct the mistake of passivity that had been committed in the five previous days. Thus, the militants lost their opportunity in this first instance, in not aggressively seeking leadership of the West Coast.

The reactionary District Executive Board, a few days later, okayed the action of Lewis, and again began negotiating with the shipowners, this time together with a delegation of representatives

from President Roosevelt. The negotiations dragged from March 28, when they were renewed, to the beginning of May. During this time, the negotiators made vague reports to the men of "progress". So far as the men knew, no agreement had been reached of any sort, but they generally took for granted that the shipowners were at least making some concessions to their demands. Subsequently it appeared that Lewis and his gang had secretly concluded what has since become known as the "April Third Agreement". This agreement was a complete sell-out. It provided for:

"Central registration and hiring hall under joint control of employers and union representatives, for the purpose of limiting the men eligible to work in this port."

This was obviously a new *Fink Hall*, which aimed to blacklist the militants.

The next problem for the employers and these treacherous "representatives" of the I.L.A. was—how to "limit the men eligible to work". The reactionaries began to maneuver in such a way that the limitation be organized under some rule that would eliminate the militants. The head of the Industrial Association in a statement issued several months later, exposed the entire game when he complained that the sell-out April Third Agreement

"was never made effective because the men could not agree on a date, after which only workers who had been employed prior to that date, would have the right to register for employment."

In the old Blue Book, only the most browbeaten, meek and loyal company men got "regular" work. Under this new system, which was being proposed, these men would be the only ones eligible to work, and large sections of the longshoremen, especially the militants, would be eliminated from the industry. While the fakers did not announce their agreement, they did try to get the local to accept their proposal to determine who were "legitimate" longshoremen. This was met with indignation and active opposition by all the longshoremen.

Finally, negotiations were ordered broken off at the beginning of May, and on May 7, the San Francisco local took a strike vote. The decision was unanimous—to strike the morning of May 9. The labor fakers were frantic. The afternoon newspapers of May 7, only a few hours before the strike vote was taken, contained a story issued by President Lewis which said:

"An adverse vote [to the employers' proposals] did not necessarily mean a strike."

And on May 8, even after the strike vote was taken, International

President Ryan wired from New York to the Northwest locals, which he considered more willing to follow his leadership, urging them not to strike. At the very last moment before the strike vote, a telegram was announced from the Department of Labor in Washington, speaking for President Roosevelt, which urged the calling off of the strike. This time the men were prepared for such maneuvers, and they threw both telegrams out. In Seattle, the first telegram of Ryan succeeded in making the local waver so that on May 8, they still voted 60 per cent against a strike, but when they received information concerning the action of the San Francisco local, a second meeting was called, and a pro-strike vote was carried by a large majority. In the two or three days following, the entire West Coast longshoremen followed. Thus, the strike began, on the morning of May 9, and by May 11, stevedoring work on the entire West Coast was tied up.

PROBLEMS IN THE CALLING OF STRIKES

A strike movement cannot stand still. It must either spread and grow in militancy, or recede. Realizing this, the militant elements laid their plans for the period of activity following May 9. The first step was to get the seamen out in sympathy actions. The Marine Workers Industrial Union, even during the week previous to the calling of the strike, was already laying its plans for sympathetic actions. When the actual strike was called, the M.W.I.U. immediately began by calling meetings of ships' crews, and held conferences of ships' delegates. By May 12, a large conference of ships' delegates organized by the M.W.I.U., voted to go into sympathetic strike.

In the course of the next few days, the sympathy strike movement spread so that practically every ship coming into port was deserted by its crews. At first, the International Seamen's Union, an affiliate of the A. F. of L., led by the notorious labor fakers, Sharrenberg and Furuseth, stood aside, expecting that the seamen would not respond to any strike movement. There was skepticism even among I.L.A. members concerning how effective such a movement might be. At best, they hoped it would be a minor auxiliary aid to the longshore strike itself. While these groups wavered concerning the value of a seamen's strike movement, the M.W.I.U. with the crews of the newly struck ships, and the scalers, held conferences and set up an independent set of demands, so that the seamen's strike, which began purely as a sympathetic movement to the longshoremen, was transformed into a fully independent strike, with their own demands. In the subsequent period, the main problem

became how to coordinate their strike settlement with that of the longshoremen. By May 16, the locals of the I.S.U. saw that they were being completely isolated by their refusal to strike, and so on that day the I.S.U. called upon its members and the ships crews to join the strike. To this day, however, Andrew Furuseth and the International Executive Board have not yet approved of the strike. Technically, therefore, the I.S.U. strike is illegal, because under their constitution, strikes are not valid until they are authorized by the International Office. On May 17, the stewards and cooks struck. On May 23, the master-mates and pilots, a small organization with militants in it, joined, followed by the marine engineers.

While the movement among the seamen was being organized by the M.W.I.U. the longshoremen were bending their efforts to call out the teamsters. The teamsters play a particularly strategic role for longshoremen. With the exception of only one other means of transportation (namely, the State Belt Line in California of which later), the teamsters are the men who move cargo after it is loaded onto the docks. From the first day of the longshore strike, all the pickets were instructed to talk to the men on the trucks, and urge them not to haul the scab cargo, but to join the strike. In the meantime, a committee was sent to the Teamsters' Union, to get them to join the action. At first Michael Casey, the chief labor faker of the Teamsters' Union, stood in the way of any sympathetic action and refused to allow the question to be taken up. However, because of the continual fraternization and discussion between the longshore pickets and the teamsters, in the course of the few days following, the teamsters were so thoroughly won over that finally, on May 14, the labor fakers were forced to yield. On that day, a decision was taken by the Teamsters' Union not to haul any cargo off the docks. This did not solve the problem altogether, because the most effective method for sympathy action on the part of the teamsters would have been a complete strike.

The next question was that of the Negro workers. For years the shipowners had followed a discriminatory policy against the Negro workers. They did this chiefly through isolating more than one hundred Negro longshoremen into one dock, namely, the Luchenback Dock. They held off hundreds of others, always promising them a job, but never giving them one. They continually held the lure before these Negro workers that in the event of the white workers going on strike, the Negro workers would then be assured jobs. The I.L.A. in its first stages, aided this discrimination, chiefly through their passive attitude towards the question of Negro workers, and in some cases, actual antagonism towards including

them in the Union. Following the rank-and-file convention, however, this was largely broken down, but by then the Negro workers were not convinced of the sincerity of the I.L.A. men, and only a few joined that union. The Negro bourgeois press tried to take advantage of this situation. The San Francisco *Spokesman*, for example, published chiefly for Northern California, carried several articles in which it warned the Negro workers against believing the pledges of the white workers for solidarity and against joining the white workers' union. They spoke sneeringly of the attitude of the I.L.A. men, who, they alleged, had adopted a patronizing attitude towards Negro workers, only because they "wanted to squeeze a few more nickels out of the shipowners". This attitude was unjustified by fact, except in isolated cases. At the early stage of the strike, certain backward elements had made statements about this being a white man's strike. But this by no means was the general opinion. Especially so, because at the rank-and-file convention and subsequently, the policy of a passive attitude towards Negroes and discrimination against them, especially in the San Francisco Bay area, was broken down and the rank and file and militants of the I.L.A. made a sincere effort to unite black and white workers. The policy of this Negro bourgeois paper was to encourage the Negroes to become scabs. Precisely when the militancy of the workers offered the most favorable moment to promote Negro and white unity, they tried to prevent unity just at the moment of its possible culmination. However, with the aid of the Communist Party, the Scottsboro Action Committee, and the I.L.D., the Negro workers were reached with appeals against this position, and success was achieved in that only a very few of the Negroes finally scabbed. At this writing, although the books of the I.L.A. are officially closed to membership for the period of the strike, a move is afoot to make an exception of the Negro workers. By this, the I.L.A. men are showing they are willing to go out of their way in order to make up for their previous passivity towards the very important question of uniting black and white workers.

Finally, in the calling of the strike, the militants were confronted with the need of avoiding the error that was committed at the time when the first call to strike was issued. This error consisted in not developing the leadership of the San Francisco Strike Committee.

The question of whether pushing the leadership of the strike committee as against the District Executive Board, was within the limits of union legality, still prevented the strike committee militants from taking aggressive action. After several discussions, the comrades were finally convinced by being given the example of the

struggle between the Soviets and the Constituent Assembly in Russia in 1917, where despite the legality of the Constituent Assembly and the unofficial character of the Soviets, all the life and problems of the people were centered in the Soviets, so that eventually in the course of struggle, the masses began to look to the Soviets for leadership out of their position and not to the Constituent Assembly. In the discussion, it was brought out how under the special circumstances which confronted us if in this strike we could do the same thing by putting all questions of relief, defense, picketing, negotiations, etc., to the strike committee, how rapidly the workers would themselves forget the strictures of legality and would instead accept the Strike Committee as their leaders, at the same time preventing any effort of the District Executive Committee to interfere with it. This would overcome the decision formerly made by the membership meeting on Monday prior to the calling of the strike on May 9, where it was decided to put all power in the hands of the District Executive Board. As a matter of fact, our policy in this connection proved to be correct, and now in the San Francisco local, the strike committee holds the real power of leadership of the masses of the longshoremen. They have succeeded in centering all the life of the strike into this Strike Committee, with the exception of negotiations. The failure to take over negotiation was paid for dearly in the weeks that followed. It was finally accomplished, however, on June 17, when Ryan and Company were booed and hissed off the platform. In this way, we have overcome the error previously committed through abiding by the limit of legality, and have raised the Strike Committee, which was composed of militant elements, to the position of the real leaders among the workers.

PROBLEMS IN THE CONDUCTING OF THE STRIKE

Once the strike was under way we divided our tasks under three main headings:

1. To keep the men united and prevent splits which might result in isolating the militants.
2. To keep the militancy on a continually upward swing.
3. To prevent any sell-out, and to gain as much as possible for the men out of the strike.

In the first days of the strike, the first job was the most difficult of all. The tradition in the industry was a splitting up of all the men into independently acting crafts. The seamen were under constant apprehension that the longshoremen would settle the strike

and return to work without any consideration for them. In this fear the seamen were justified, because the longshoremen were under constant pressure from the I.L.A. officials "not to have too many tails to their kite", by which they meant to negotiate their own agreement independent of all the other crafts. On the other hand, the I.S.U. seamen were under a terrific pressure from their own leaders, who intrigued with the shipowners and who urged the men to "utilize the opportunity to get the most out of it for themselves, irrespective of the other crafts". Both groups of fakers warned the men of a repetition of the 1919 and 1921 strikes, where, in the first, the seamen scabbed on the longshoremen, and in the second, the longshoremen scabbed on the seamen.

The problem of unity was further complicated by the fact that most of the men were not yet convinced that Ryan and the other fakers were not their friends. Under pressure of this confused attitude of the men, even many of the militants were afraid to express sharply any formulations against Ryan. As a result, on a number of occasions the *Western Worker* and the Communist elements in the strike had to make concessions on minor points in these formulations so as not to break the unity of the men and to keep that unity for the main objectives of the strike.

A third problem in maintaining the unity was the uneven development of the strike. For example, in the Northwest, shipping was completely tied up. This same condition existed in San Francisco, with but one slight exception, of which we shall speak later. In Los Angeles, however, both because the union leadership was the most reactionary, and because militant organization was weak and the terror strong, scabbing went on on a large scale. As a result, in Seattle, Portland, and San Francisco, the A. F. of L. fakers, the capitalist press and the shipowners raised the cry that the continuation of the strike was a scheme of the Los Angeles Chamber of Commerce, because it diverted shipping from other ports to their benefit. There was a strong danger that the men would be influenced by this agitation, and it had to be counteracted.

A fourth problem in maintaining unity was created by the continuous splitting activities of the fakers. This included such diverse elements as Paddy Morris, a renegade of Tacoma who is working with the Proletarian Party; "Dirty" White of the Socialist Party of San Francisco; Holman, former president of the San Francisco local, and a typical tool in the hands of the reactionary A. F. of L. officials; Lewis and Company, the leaders of the District Executive Board; and Ryan, president of the I.L.A. One example for each will illustrate the activity of these gentlemen:

PADDY MORRIS, RENEGADE

When Ryan first arrived in San Francisco the fakers apparently decided to utilize his fresh arrival in order to stampede the militants into giving all power to the reactionaries in the settlement of the strike. In this, they almost succeeded through utilizing Paddy Morris. Morris arose in the local union meeting as it opened and delivered a long harangue in which he denounced capitalists, spoke for the class struggle, hurrahd for a militant strike, and finally concluded with the proposal that:

1. The seamen and longshoremen hold separate negotiations, and do not settle the strike jointly.

2. Hours and wages should be referred to arbitration.

3. The question of hiring halls be left in the hands of Ryan.

Under the impetus created by his preliminary revolutionary remarks, the men were confused and swept off their feet, and on that evening, the fakers actually succeeded in putting this program across. Two days later, at a special meeting called by the Strike Committee, after the men had had time to examine the meaning of their decisions, most of these actions were rescinded.

"DIRTY" WHITE

"Dirty" White, of the Socialist Party, maintained that his only difference with the Communists and other militants in the strike was that he believed the strikers had the best chance if the Communists stayed in the background. He believed this so firmly that when the I.L.A. called for a mass parade and Civic Center demonstration one Sunday, he went to various organizations and urged them to answer the I.L.A. call only on condition that it would be definitely decided that no Communists were either to participate in the parade or to speak at the meeting. Incidentally, this action, when exposed before the men, temporarily at least, eliminated "Dirty" White from the scene.

LEWIS AND CO.

Lewis and Company, the leaders of the District Executive Board at the early Strike Publicity Committee meetings, sneered at everything the Strike Publicity Committee did, with an air of confidence that the strike would soon be broken and all these "Reds" would be given their place, while he and his reactionary clique would ride high. This attitude on the part of Lewis and Company kept them aloof from the San Francisco Strike Publicity Committee for the first three weeks of the strike. Their action, in fact, helped the militants, because it gave them a breathing space in which to con-

solidate their strength. It was only after the first three weeks that Lewis and Company, seeing their abstention was futile, entered with their disruptive tactics.

RYAN

Ryan's reputation reached the West Coast long before he arrived physically. The militants prepared the ground for him before he arrived. For two weeks before his arrival, the West Coast capitalist press carried long and laudatory articles about him. The militants were not idle either. So a battle over Ryan raged until finally, two days before his arrival, on May 22, the *San Francisco News* featured the following item:

"That man [upon whom the outcome of the strike depends] is Joseph Ryan, International President of the I.L.A. He is due here Thursday night from New York after making considerable progress in the settlement of longshore strikes in that city, and in Texas.

"Due to his efforts, 1,000 stevedores returned to work in New York yesterday, but even before Ryan could start westward, there was a heavy bombardment of propaganda against him from Communist ranks in San Francisco.

"Even members of the longshoremen's strike committee openly cast doubt upon his powers in connection with the Pacific Coast strike."

Ryan arrived on Thursday night, and, as we have already related above, was able to put over his sell-out proposals before the men could properly acquaint themselves with him. That Saturday, however, the I.L.A. local rescinded most of the actions. On Monday morning following, the police launched their fiercest attack on the picket line that had yet been witnessed. As a result of this attack at least two are known to have been killed, and scores wounded. The same afternoon, obviously timed with the police attack, Ryan submitted a set of sell-out proposals. Following this, Ryan's actions were a continuous policy of deception. He submitted the ship-owners' proposals continually to the men. Each time, however, with a different wording, although the essence of the proposals remained practically the same. On three different occasions, in an effort to save himself with the men, he announced publicly that he had made mistakes. On one occasion he submitted a secret referendum to a vote of the men, and although he personally toured the coast in behalf of his proposals, most of the locals refused to vote. In San Francisco, where it was submitted, it was snowed under 2350 to 78. On June 5th, the situation for Ryan became so bad that when he appeared before a meeting of the strikers in Frisco, he was loudly booed. At this point he began to change his tactics. Every time the

police attacked workers, he blustered about calling out the longshoremens of the East as an answer to police terror. Of course, he not only didn't call them out, but when through the efforts of the M.W.I.U. in New York, some longshoremens were influenced to act in sympathy, Ryan telephoned New York to order them back to work. In order to weaken picketing, Ryan continually oozed optimism concerning negotiations for the settlement of the strike. We were paying bitterly for the Strike Committee and rank and file not having taken over negotiations from the first. The see-saw character in the attitude of the strikers really shows the weakness of the militants at the early stages of the strike, and the stage of confusion which then existed. But as the strike progressed, the attitude of the workers became more determined and clear.

OUR LACK OF SKILL IN WORKING WITH THE MASSES

The final problem in maintaining the unity of the men was our own lack of skill in working with masses. A few illustrations of this will suffice. In order that the Marine Workers Union should be aided to maintain its leadership of the seamen in the strike, it was arranged that a hotel should house all the striking seamen while they are in port, and that feeding should take place in the seamen's hall so that pickets could be properly checked in and out. However, some "very efficient" comrades decided it would be "more practical" to feed the Marine Workers Union members in the joint feeding hall conducted by the other unions, and made the change without proper consultation on the question. As a result, this important and influential check on the Marine Workers Union picket lines was weakened. On the positive side of the ledger in this connection, however, the men did make a fight to force the City Administration to give relief to longshore strikers' families, and the Marine Workers Union initiated a fight for the government feeding of the single men, which was, however, disrupted by opposition from the I.S.U. officialdom.

In the early stages of the strike, the International Labor Defense, the Workers International Relief and the *Western Worker* all offered, unconditionally, to put their resources at the disposal of the strikers. On the whole, this made a very good impression and was accepted by the men. In some cases, as in connection with relief, there was some hesitation to accept the W.I.R., but we proceeded without official acceptance to feed the pickets, and the resulting favorable reaction made it possible for the W.I.R. openly to enter relief work on the waterfront.

DEVELOPING MILITANCY

We found that the secret of developing the militancy of the strike was to keep the men active, and doing something at all times. The danger spots were usually the week-ends, when there was a tendency to take the Sundays off. In order to counteract that, special activities besides picket lines, mass parades, meetings and strike affairs were arranged. Strikers were continually sent to outlying areas, particularly where college students, or unemployed, might be recruited as scabs. In one respect, we failed to carry through our policy. This was in connection with a small railroad operated in California by the State Government, called the State Belt Line. It is a typical example of Socialist Party "public ownership". The men on this line operate under a yellow-dog contract with the government, which prohibits them from striking for any cause under penalty of losing their seniority, insurance, etc. A number of efforts were made to pull them out. But the weakness of these efforts made for the continued scabbing of this road. A few half-hearted attempts were made, through marking up the freight cars with the slogan "Scab Goods, Don't Haul", but this proved to be very insufficient. In fact, there was a feeling among the dockers that we should not go too hard on the State Belt Line men because there was some justification in their failure to act in sympathy. Of course, another important factor which prevented effective picketing, especially in relation to the State Belt Line, was the terrific terror which developed. The San Francisco Police Chief issued the slogan "Clubs Are Trumps", and under this slogan, mercilessly clubbed down and shot into strikers' ranks. In one way, this helped the fight against the "Red scare". On Wednesday, May 30, following the Monday when the police made the big attack on the picket line, a Y.C.L. National Youth Day demonstration was held on the waterfront. The police attacked it even more ferociously than they had attacked the longshoremen's picket line previously. As a result, the men immediately showed a spirit of solidarity, and the I.L.A. issued an official statement in sympathy with the Y.C.L. In some isolated ports, particularly in Portland, it was reported that a dozen or more policemen had to be suspended because of their sympathy with the strike, and their refusal to act as thugs for the shipowners.

WRONG WAYS OF ATTACKING THE MISLEADERS

We have spoken before of our own lack of skill in working with masses. Because we have seen the same errors committed in so many struggles, a few illustrations of this lack of skill would be instructive. The outstanding example is the unskilled way in which

we attacked the fakers. Even the *Daily Worker*, which certainly knows better, allowed, at the very beginning of the strike, a title to be written to one picture at the top of the front page, reading:

"The Marine Workers Industrial Union has called on striking longshoremen to resist the strike-breaking efforts of the I.L.A."

In view of the fact that the local I.L.A. strike leadership in San Francisco were militants, and that the real intent of the *Daily* was to warn against the possible strike-breaking tactics of the District and National officials, certainly this featured sentence was a very careless and harmful one. The writing of such a careless sentence almost cost us our unity with the men. When the first copies of the *Daily* went down to the waterfront, there was immediately a resentment amongst the men, and the reactionaries took advantage of it by raising the cry, "This is Communist strike-breaking".

An example of a similar nature of lack of skill in working with masses is the manner in which comrades waited to discredit the fakers. When Ryan first arrived, and previous to that, in connection with Lewis and Finnegan (the District officials located in San Francisco), there was constant pressure from some comrades, particularly comrades who had nothing to do with the strike and were away from the immediate situation, to issue leaflets calling these fakers all sorts of names—none of which the workers believed, or would believe. The issuance of leaflets of that nature would result only in provoking an anti-Communist sentiment because every attack upon the fakers was regarded by the yet confused mass of men as an attack upon the entire organization. We therefore followed the tactic instead of continually putting the fakers in a position where they had to come out against certain militant policies, and defend their own reactionary and treacherous actions. It was through such a process that we gradually won over the membership. In fact, whereas at the beginning, the men did not listen to any criticism of Lewis, Finnegan and Ryan and Company, and even voted this crew full power to negotiate and settle the strike, at this writing, Ryan has been booed off the platform, and driven out of San Francisco. Some opportunist elements might take courage from this criticism, and justify their frequent resistance to exposing labor fakers in their unions. In answer to any such possible reaction, we want to emphasize here that even we were not energetic enough in exposing the fakers at the beginning, among San Francisco longshoremen. Our criticism is not of a too energetic exposure of the fakers, but of a too unskilled exposure. Mere name-calling may satisfy the record so far as carrying out our policy to discredit the

fakers, but it does not necessarily achieve the purpose of discrediting them. A skilled handling of the situation, however, an aggressive militant policy, and especially a continuous drive towards greater militancy in the specific situation, will eventually achieve that purpose. Exposing Ryan on the basis of what happened in the Gulf ports and on the East Coast, helped with but a few men. But when we were able to expose Ryan's actions, and mobilize the men against him specifically on the West Coast developments, Ryan was completely discredited. Had we taken a sectarian position and broken with the men on phrase formulations in the early part of the struggle, our later drive against Ryan would have had no following.

This same lack of skill in working with masses was illustrated in another point. The rumor reached San Francisco, that Peterson, an I.L.A. faker in San Pedro, had made a separate agreement with some shipowners to load, thus breaking the united West Coast front. In my own mind, I am convinced that it is easily within Peterson's character to have done such a thing. However, there was no proof of the assertion. Despite this fact, one of the comrades (not a long-shoreman, but active in another capacity), thinking to strike against the fakers, took it upon himself to send out news releases in the name of the *Western Worker* relating this rumor, but leaving the impression that it was official and confirmed. The strikers immediately came to the conclusion that this was a story spread by ship-owners to demoralize the men. When they found out that this notice had some connection with the *Western Worker*, they were so enraged that the close relation between the strikers and the *Western Worker* hung in the balance by a thread. The most loyal militants on the Strike Committee succeeded in holding in abeyance a motion to break with the *Western Worker* for a few hours, during which time the matter was straightened out. In this one can see an illustration where mere zealotry in exposing fakers is not effective. One must be responsible in such a situation for what one says. To date, despite strenuous efforts, we have not been able to find real proof that this rumor concerning Peterson was true.

The source of much of our lack of skill in working in the situation came from an oppositionist and minority ideology, which some of our comrades have. These comrades had a tendency to become professional critics and "line givers". They examine the struggle, not for its action but for perfection in its phrases. Real mass movements do not reach absolute perfection of phrase or thought. Their revolutionary character is there nevertheless. A few comrades who knew little or nothing of what went on were the worst offend-

ers. In many cases, this criticism was extremely supercilious, based on ignorance and an academic approach. It came largely from comrades who were not involved in the practical strike activities, but who had read previously resolutions of other strikes and tried mechanically to transfer that criticism to this strike. A case in point is the question of picketing. For several days in the course of the strike, especially following the two outbursts of terror on May 28, and 30, the longshoremen yielded to the pressure of the police, and instead of picketing directly in the entrance of the docks, picketed across the street. The Strike Committee worked frantically against this tendency and succeeded in overcoming it only several weeks later. Yet, the "wise" know-alls demanded that the *Western Worker* issue a criticism of the Strike Committee because the men were picketing on the other side of the street. To issue such a criticism, not only did not correspond to fact and would have been sheer idiocy, but would have put us in a position of sectarian isolated oppositionists. Instead of doing that, the militants helped the Strike Committee which was trying to overcome the situation.

A word is here in point concerning the "Red scare", and how the Party appeared before the workers. In order to get the proper background, you should know that our Party in California has been under a terrific anti-Red barrage for almost a year. Hardly a day passes without 8-column headlines, feature stories, and editorials in the capitalist papers, containing provocations against Communists. The State government, through both the late Governor Rolph and present Governor Merriam, has issued statements justifying and provoking lynch terror against Communists. As is well-known, for the past year, this terror has been widespread indeed. From the cotton strike in the Fall of 1933 to this moment, seven California workers have been murdered in strikes, over 900 jailed, close to 600 tried, scores convicted and hundreds wounded. This terror also took the form of an ideological campaign, with lectures to students in the schools, lectures before churches and clubs of various sorts, etc. It was, of course, the reaction of the capitalist press against the increased ability of the Party to lead determined strike and other struggles. When the longshore strike opened, the capitalist class at first gloated over the fact that the Communists were being kept out. They were able to do this on the basis of assurance from the labor skates in the District Executive Committee that the militants would be eliminated. Before the strike was several weeks old, the papers were howling with "Red scare" stories, typical of which was: "Strike Out of Hand, in Control of Communists".

Despite this fact, the I.L.A. Strike Committee kept the *Western Worker* as its spokesman; we were able to fight down the "Red scare" against the Marine Workers Industrial Union among the seamen; and after a bitter fight, give it a place on the joint Strike Committee. We have recruited to date, in San Francisco alone, about 25 longshoremen, and over 50 seamen; in San Pedro about 40 of both categories together, and in the Northwest ports, many more, although we have not the figures at hand at this moment. In connection with showing the Party's role to the strikers and working class generally, we had another example of the stupid sectarian tendencies that yet persist. When the men took certain militant actions, these comrades insisted that the District Committee issue leaflets saying in effect: "We told you to do so and so". This would have been an excellent weapon in the hands of the shipowners. The men were grateful that the "Reds" gave them help and leadership without bombast. At several strike meetings, representatives of the *Western Worker* were officially invited to, and did speak from the platform. At many mass meetings, especially those held against the terror, and not directly under the I.L.A. auspices, Communist candidates spoke side by side with the best known I.L.A. and seamen strike leaders. At one point the reactionaries became especially menacing with anti-Red agitation, urging having nothing to do with Communists. However, the popularity of the Party was shown the next day when the Party sent an official donation of \$25 to the Strike Committee. After a short discussion, this was warmly accepted, and with considerable applause at the mention of the Party, and the reactionaries found themselves in a very uncomfortable position. The leadership of the strike in San Francisco by Communist and other militant elements is well-known and accepted. All through the strike, the Communist participants have become increasingly better liked by the workers. This was accomplished, not only by the Party, but also,—needless to say, much against its intentions—by the Police Department, which thought to frighten the strikers by showing them the political police records of the Party members who were strike leaders. However, by that time, the ground had been well-prepared, and these comrades gained all the greater prestige for this. In one strike demonstration, the police with a handful of misled strikers, stopped the sale of the *Western Worker*. In the next I.L.A. membership meeting, Ryan tried to follow up with an attack on the Communist Party and urged to expel anyone selling the *Western Worker*. The men answered by unanimously voting to "apologize to the Communist Party because the sale of the *Western Worker* was stopped" by unauthorized members.

THE PERSPECTIVES FOR THE OUTCOME

What are the perspectives in the settlement of the strike? On June 16, for the second time in the course of the strike, all capitalist papers carried tremendous headlines that the strike was settled, that it had been settled in an agreement between Ryan and the fakers in the Teamsters and other unions, the Mayor of San Francisco, and the shipowners. This agreement was a complete sell-out. It referred the question of hours and wages to arbitration. It created joint hiring halls between the shipowners and the I.L.A., specifying that the I.L.A. end would be controlled, not by elected representatives of the rank and file, but by the officials. It carried a sentence which speaks about the fact that the agreement is made between the "responsible" I.L.A. heads and the shipowners. On June 17, all the newspapers carried pictures of the labor fakers shaking hands with the shipowners, and congratulating each other on the conclusion of the strike. On June 17, however, a mass meeting was called in San Francisco, and this was followed by mass meetings in Portland and Tacoma, and after that the other ports. The San Francisco mass meeting, which was the best attended longshoremen's meeting in the entire strike, was from beginning to end a tremendous demonstration against Ryan and the fakers before the militants. Ryan was howled out, and in the end had to plead "that your International President should be allowed at least three minutes to plead his case".

Finally, the close to three thousand men gathered in the hall allowed him the three minutes, but he was interrupted constantly, and finally had to quit. As against that, Harry Bridges, accepted leader of the militants, and branded in the press as an outstanding Red, and an alien (an Australian by birth) was warmly received with a splendid ovation, and every proposal he made in the name of the militant strike committee, was carried. This included a rank-and-file negotiations committee—the final link completing the original plan for Strike Committee leadership. Under the impetus of this momentum, 1,000 seamen, under I.S.U. auspices, held a meeting that night, and repudiated the policies of their leaders and voted for a united front with the Marine Workers Industrial Union. The next day the I.S.U. fakers declared the meeting unconstitutional because it was not limited only to paid up members, and demanded the unseating of the Marine Workers Industrial Union in the Central Strike Committee. The M.W.I.U. representatives offered "not to stand in the way of unity" and would withdraw. This was an error which the fakers took advantage of, and expelled the M.W.I.U. On June 17, a paid-up membership meeting of the I.S.U. again

reversed the fakery and voted for a united front with the M.W.I.U. At this writing, the fight to reseat the M.W.I.U. delegates is still on—but M.W.I.U. speakers are allowed at official mass meetings held under joint auspices. Most of our difficulties in this connection were due to our failure to organize an effective I.S.U. opposition. Our later progress was due to our correcting this weakness.

That same day, news came that Portland, Tacoma, and Everett had followed in the same spirit as San Francisco. In Los Angeles, because of the weaknesses of the militant group, it was voted, by a small majority, to accept the Ryan plan. This, however, is ineffective because they did not have the two-thirds majority as required by the West Coast constitution, and because the rest of the Coast outweighed them. Ryan, however, still at the service of the shipowners, immediately rushed to San Pedro where the weakest link might be broken. Thus far, he has gotten nowhere. From Seattle, we have no news at this writing. There, however, Ryan had previously made a break with the Alaska ships. He was able to confuse the workers into concluding a separate agreement with them. The weakness of the militant group made it possible for him to get away with it. However, since then, a considerable reaction is taking place, and it is possible that following the Ryan fiasco of June 16, the Alaska men will again come out.

Already Holman, former reactionary president of the San Francisco local of the I.L.A. and now expelled, is trying to form a separate union, but to date he has not even succeeded in getting the signatures of ten bona fide longshoremen in order to get recognition as a minority union under the provisions of the N. R.A. In the meantime, the shipowners are losing in the San Francisco port alone \$109,000 daily, according to their own statement. In addition, \$700,000 is lost daily in other business which is interconnected. To date the shipowners alone have lost over three million dollars. To consider the loss for the whole coast, one can multiply this figure by at least three. How long the shipowners can hold out under this terrific loss is hard to tell. They are doing their best to mobilize sentiment by spreading rumors that this is really a strike to seize governmental power. As against this, the strikers' ranks are still solid. In San Francisco to date, only five longshoremen are scabbing out of about 4,000. There are many more scabs than these, but they are imported from elsewhere. About 110 ships are tied up in the harbor, giving testimony to the effectiveness of the strike. Whether the men will win or not depends on whether the

strike movement can continue to spread and rise in militancy. At this moment there is considerable agitation going on for a general strike. The I.L.A. strike committee has already issued the call asking other locals to respond. The Machinists Local 68, the Painters Local No. 1158 and a few others, have already answered the call, and in the next week or so the rest of the locals will vote on the question. The referendum is going on over the heads of the Central Labor Council, which ruled the question out of order at its last meeting, and quickly adjourned for fear the fakers would not be able to hold the ranks in the face of the demand of the rank and file. In the last few days, encouraging reports have come from the East, the Australian and some European ports concerning sympathy actions. If these sympathy actions spread, especially on the East Coast and in the Gulf ports, the victory of the strike is certain.

The attitude of the bourgeois press regarding settlement is shown by the leading editorial in the *San Francisco News* of June 18:

"At the outset of the strike many believed that the men were making a mistake and letting themselves in for a quick and decisive defeat. Few realized the solidarity that they have since demonstrated through their success in enlisting the sympathy of the teamsters and of other marine workers and in almost completely tying up this port.

"It appeared then that with thousands out of work the men had chosen a time to strike that would play into the hands of employer extremists who would welcome an opportunity to dispose of unionism once and for all.

"Events have proven otherwise. Every thoughtful citizen of San Francisco has been impressed with the sincerity and depth of the men's determination and sense of grievance.

"But this does not alter our conviction that they must act now to profit from their initial advantage.

"A war to the finish might easily grow into the worst disaster for San Francisco since the fire of 1906. It would mean lost lives and broken families, and defeat would deal a blow to the cause of unionism from which it would take years to recover."

The victory of the strike would be a tremendous advance for the whole working class. It would establish the right of militant leaders to function within the A. F. of L. It would make impossible the elimination of the militants from the industry. It would give courage to the whole working class of the West to fight for demands similar to those of the longshoremen, and above all, it would establish for the first time in the history of the United States, absolute solidarity between longshoremen and seamen, and a large measure of solidarity with the rest of the working class.

Above all, the San Francisco Maritime Strike is a tribute to the correctness of the Party's policy of concentration—the returns for

even the considerable effort put in were far greater in revolutionary advance than practically any other activity.

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We must add a note about the tremendous mass meeting which took place last night (June 19—the end of the sixth week of the strike) in the Civic Auditorium in San Francisco, under the joint auspices of all striking unions. After a stubborn fight the Marine Workers Industrial Union was included in the conduct of the meeting. Comrade Harry Jackson, who spoke, was warmly received. Also, all the other strikers who got the greatest ovation are those who have been labelled and are known throughout the city and among the strikers as the “Red leaders”. Ryan asked to speak, but was refused. Those speakers not known as “Reds” were well-received but not in the same thunderous spirit, and at least one faker who wriggled his way on to the speaker’s list was received with boos.

Mayor Rossi, in his speech, spoke for everyone supporting the A. F. of L. This was received with tremendous boos all over the hall. The political significance lies in the maturing understanding of the masses who understand the role of the officialdom of the A. F. of L., despite the fact that this strike is technically being led by the A. F. of L. affiliate.

The hall was jammed, every seat having being taken and most of the aisles crowded. There were between eighteen and twenty thousand people present. The height of the meeting was reached when John Delaney, the best known militant on the waterfront, and called a Communist leader in all the press, which also gave publicity to his record as a Communist activist, called for a general strike. This brought the whole audience to its feet in a thunderous demonstration.

This meeting shows the strike at this date has not yet reached the height of its militancy, and the movement towards a general strike is, possibly too slowly, yet undoubtedly, moving forward.